

HEALTH

Claudication

Claudication is pain in the calf or thigh muscle that occurs after you have walked a certain distance, such as a block or two. The pain stops after you rest for a while. Each time the pain occurs, it takes about the same amount of time for the pain to go away after you stop walking. If you notice pain in your leg after you walk a block or more, you may have claudication.

What causes claudication?

Claudication occurs because not enough blood is flowing to a muscle. The artery that normally supplies blood to the muscle gets narrow and less blood can flow through the artery. However, when you exercise (walk), the working muscle needs more blood and the narrowed artery may not let enough through. Atherosclerosis causes the arteries in the legs to become narrow.

Who is at risk of getting claudication?

Risk factors for claudication include high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, cigarette smoking and older age. Claudication is also more likely in people who already have atherosclerosis in other arteries in the body, such as the arteries in the heart or brain. People with claudication may have had a heart attack or stroke.

How is claudication diagnosed?

Your doctor will check the pulses in the arteries in your legs. He or she may use a stethoscope to listen to the sound of your blood going through your arteries. Your doctor may hear a noise in an artery, called a bruit, which may be a warning to your doctor that there is a narrow area in the artery.

What can a person do to treat the symptoms of claudication?

First, change your lifestyle to reduce the risk factors for claudication. If you smoke, it is very important to stop. Slowly begin an exercise program and gradually increase the time you spend exercising. If claudication occurs while exercising, stop and rest until the pain is gone. In addition, medications such as pentoxifylline and cilostazol may help your claudication. Your doctor can tell you which one is right for you.

